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AUTHOR Lencyk, John A.
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ABSTRACT

The traditional sellers' market in higher education has become a buyers' market, with both the nature of the student body and the services offered being changed. Marketing, as a comprehensive tool for planning and delivery of educational services, offers an integrated method for meeting the disparate demands growing from the shift to a longer learning cycle. New baseline data will be needed to supplement and even supplant current research on the traditional college population. To date, no unified approach such as the business world has taken exists in higher education. This is reflected in the literature of postsecondary marketing. However, the need to understand how the exchange of services occurs in the higher education marketplace is imperative, and is not, as some believe, a perversion of academic ideals. M. S. Knowles' theories of adult education are particularly applicable to the demographic shift in postsecondary education because his contrasting of the force-feeding of young adults in college (pedagogy) with the experience-based approach to adult learning (andragogy) is analogous to necessary change in marketing approaches. The move toward andragogy can be an important element in developing the identity of the school, which is in turn an important element in marketing strategy. The issue of identity is one of projecting a clear, uncompromised image, directly linked to its programming and objectives. The disjointed marketing done today can only increase feelings of separation, disunity, and impersonality among faculty, students, and staff; directed and unified marketing would aid school image, the institution itself, and its broadening constituencies. (MSE)

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Post-Secondary Education: Entering the Age of the Consumer

by

John A. Lencyk
Director, News and Publications
El Paso Community College

Ph.D. Candidate
New Mexico State University

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POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: ENTERING THE AGE OF THE CONSUMER

The traditional sellers' market in higher education has become a buyers' market. With increased focus on lifelong learning concepts and the expansion of educational opportunities for all non-traditional students, both the nature of the student body and the services being planned and offered must necessarily change. This new educational environment challenges colleges and universities to, in some focused and cost-effective way, address a gamut of learning needs for an obviously diverse market. The task is a formidable one, since there are many suggestions that marketing of educational opportunities has been little appreciated. Nevertheless, the development, or in some cases the very survival, of post-secondary institutions will depend in great measure on their comprehensive response to unprecedented market conditions.

Addressing needs of learners beyond the traditional 17-21 age group is significantly underway, as evidenced by discussions and forecasts in recent major publications: Lifelong Learning in America (Peterson and Associates, 1979); The Modern Practice of Adult Education (Knowles, 1980); and the Carnegie Council's Three Thousand Futures (1980). While reasons cited for this shift in educational direction are manifold--including an expanded search on the part of the institution for prospective students in the face of stabilizing or declining enrollments, and the need of the student for updated knowledge and job skills--the

ultimate reality for educators is that a new and older audience is emerging as a major target market for post-secondary learning activities. Thus it is quite likely that more educational demands will be made by learners over a broader span of their lifetime. This greater demand will, in turn, increase the pressure to identify the needs of these new consumers and provide appropriate quality educational services. Marketing, of all institutional services, should well be one of the justifiable concerns of educators.

Marketing: Coming Out of the Educational Closet

Marketing, as a comprehensive tool for planning and delivery, offers an integrated method meeting the disparate demands growing from the shift to a longer learning cycle. New baseline data will be necessary not only to supplement but, in many cases, to supplant current research and studies predicated on serving a restricted population, i.e., the immediate post-high school age group.

In business and industry marketing plays an overt and well-defined role. Field testing, measuring cost effectiveness, advertising, competitive strategizing--all are part of the commercial marketing mix. For the most part, however, no such unified approach exists in post-secondary education. The basic process of offering a product(educational opportunities and services) to a target population(potential learners) for remuneration (tuition, fees), has been done in a disjointed and disaggregate manner.

A literature search conducted at New Mexico State University in Spring, 1981, of several data bases(ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts, and ABI), using marketing and post-secondary education as descriptors, yielded relatively meager results. Of 59 citations listed for the period 1966-81, over half(33) were noted for the period 1979-81. This reflects a need for and interest in educational marketing that has emerged only recently. The paucity of the literature and its content--the majority of which presents a picture of marketing as a parochial function of admissions, or student recruitment, or public information--points to a conclusion that there is little overall philosophy and almost no unified institutional direction in the presentation of the total services of an institution.

Beyond philosophical considerations, which often caustically relate marketing to insidious business practices, lack of marketing at the post-secondary level in education

> may relate to the lack of a managerial orientation in the academic preparation of many administrators. In addition, the goals espoused by many institutions are frequently based solely on what faculty and administrators want to accomplish, rather than what is needed by the institution's constituents (Allen, 1978).

Acknowledged or not, marketing is, and has, taken place, albeit in patchwork fashion. Many of the components of an effective marketing effort are already in place at an institution but remain unharnessed. For example, a study (El Sharei, 1979) of public relations programs at 11 West Coast colleges showed that

marketing tools varying from press releases, mailing of class schedules, and recruitment, were being used as part of institutional promotional strategies. None of those surveyed, however, acknowledged the existence of a master marketing plan or any overall marketing direction.

Krachenberg (1972) likewise called attention to the absence of a systematic approach to marketing. He cited individual offices at universities which were almost unilaterally responsible for student recruitment, solicitation of alumni, and lobbying the legislature. "Unfortunately," he remarked, "marketing is often done poorly, with a keen lack of appreciation for all the tools of marketing and how they can be combined into a total program " (p. 370).

It is that kind of total program that is especially crucial in a time of increasing financial, competitive, and federal constraints. Moreover, with the growth of a more sophisticated student population it is essential that the product line, in this case educational programming, be well defined. Anything less might result in confusion, dissatisfaction, and a disservice. A false step in the marketing process can produce a ripple effect far surpassing the original cause. Krachenberg refers to this when he observes:

> Marketing decisions, probably more than any other class of administrative activity, encompass manifold ethical dimensions. A university's decision about a new degree program can literally change the course of society. It can influence career choice, role in life, level of income, indeed the whole life style of countless numbers of individuals. How it is promoted by teachers and catalogs, how it is made available, and when, where, to whom and at what price, directly affect and, even more critically, determine those who consume (p. 379).

Education and Consumerism: The New Arena

If marketing is little appreciated in the present, it may be more cultivated in a future that places greater premium on consumer need. The educational environment and the new student population of the next two decades can be described, in part, by extrapolating from general forecasts and preliminary studies of the present. First, and foremost, the learner of the next 20 years will be quite unlike any that has preceded. This new consumer/student is summarized succintly by the Final Report of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education:

> ....By 2000, there will be more women than men, as many people over 21 as 21 and under, nearly as many part-time as full-time attendees, and one quarter of all students will be minorities. Roughly one-half of the students in the classroom of 2000 would not have been there if the composition of 1960 had been continued. This is a fundamental, almost radical change in higher education (Three Thousand Futures, p. 53).

Changes in the nature of the student body will be caused by many developments that must be taken into account in the marketing strategies. New delivery systems, via video and computer hardware and specialized software, will allow a broad implementation of interactive programming at off-campus locations. Less time on campus and in conventional classrooms will diminish both the collegial environment and the time for student participation in activities or movements (Three Thousand Futures, p. 28). Students, comfortable with computers and the attendant logic, will expect the university to present orderly, well-defined educational programs and services. There will be no inclination to spend time deciphering pages of

academic jargon in catalogs or wasting time with convoluted admissions processing. The new students will wield the rights of and make the demands of consumers.

Specific literature (Araiolo and Kuh, 1979; Munday, 1976; Cross, 1979), based on the first wave of non-traditional students, suggests that the new student population is significantly different in attitudes and needs. The largely monolithic thinking that has formed the basis for counseling, registering, teaching, and communicating with various student populations at the post-secondary level must change. This thinking is in great measure a consequence of the traditional narrow target audience of higher education. The non-traditional student group will be a far more heterogeneous population.

Implications for Marketing

Under conditions where the market parameters change drastically, the need to examine and understand how the exchange of services occurs in this marketplace is imperative. Marketing is a system that forces this type of study. It encourages a scrutiny of the product, in this case educational services. Marketing prompts greater inquiry of potential consumers at point of entry, during consumption, and measures satisfaction. Above all, marketing is a total concept that places the consumer as its highest priority. Contrary to the misgivings of some in higher education, marketing is not a perversion of academic ideals. Philip Kotler, who authored the benchmark text, Marketing for

Nonprofit Organizations (1975), said:

> Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives. It relies heavily on designing the organization's offering in terms of the target market's need and desire, and on using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service the market (p. 5).

In these terms marketing can be seen as a complementary planning method and not a form of hucksterism.

Marketing success is dependent, above all else, on an atmosphere where there is constant recognition of the needs of the consumers. In any venture there is the temptation to take advangtage of the short-term windfall in lieu of a more stable, less spectacular, long-range dividend. In post-secondary education the ready supply of consumers has fostered a tendency to take their needs for granted. In this environment some institutional representatives have been inclined to exhibit both complacency and condescension (Kunz, 1981). This attitude has not yet been touched by the changing needs of students. It does not reflect an awareness that institutions, not consumers, have to prove themselves in the marketplace. This awareness of the student as decision-maker has a rough parallel in theories especially associated with Knowles (Modern Practice of Adult Education, 1980). He views the philosophical shift in education as the move from pedagogy to andragogy, "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43).

Knowles' theories are particularly adaptable to the marketing schema because they contrast the force-feeding of material usually associated with the teaching of a young learner and the experience-based and more directed approach compatible with adults. Knowles' dichotomy is essentially developed for the teaching and learning processes but it is, in general, a model for the same distinctions necessary to conduct marketing in the lifelong learning environment. As a philosophical framework for marketing, adragogy can help institutions respond sensitively to a more discerning consumer, offer some direction in planning services and programming for different age groups, and can impact the identity of the school.

This identity, a concept of image and credibility, is more than a cosmetic public relations function. As some institutions fall by the wayside or are crippled by the weight of the new educational agenda, it will become increasingly important for those remaining to define exactly what they are and what they offer. Identity may be a key to recruitment. More probably, in an era when courses of several different schools can be equally accessed through learning centers or video terminals, the absence of identity may have a marked effect on enrollment.

Identity may be viewed as all representatives of an institution understanding its mission and philosophy and explaining and exemplifying that message to a variety of publics. Identity can, and should, be the sum of a systemmatic plan to post-secondary educational services. At times the image

presented to the public can be blurred, confusing, and even contradictory. Academicians themselves have been bewildered or dismayed about the role or identity of their institutions. For many years, as example, this was the case for some in the community college ranks. Was the community college a glorified high school or a lower level and inelegant university? What were its services and where were the target populations? Only when the educators themselves clarified these issues was confidence restored to those working within the community college system and the residents of the service area (Monroe, 1980).

The question of identity, of projecting a clear, uncompromised image, can be directly linked to the programming and objectives of a school. An initial and logical first step in a marketing plan is to assess the product, consumer perceptions about the product line and/or the company, and analyze organizational objectives. This data becomes the baseline for future action and further studies. Such information becomes particularly thought provoking when discrepancies are found to exist between the feelings/perceptions of the consumer and the stated objectives or market plans for the product.

In the context of higher education the initial marketing assessment can link many areas of the school and begin to reveal the image and image problems of the institution. Perhaps a focus group is employed as part of the overall assessment. It may help school administrators realize that though an 'open door' admissions policy is widely advertised as a selling point of the institution,

the support services are insufficient to properly assist all students who may opt to open that door. The result: High attrition of ill-prepared and ill-advised students. The review process shows that an admissions policy designed to boost enrollment produces the opposite effect. This finding may, in turn, lead to more discrete analysis of such functions as admissions processing, availability and readibility of informational literature, counseling services, and registration procedures. The impact of these areas on students completing studies can be evaluated. Problems can be identified and addressed. This ability to pinpoint barriers to student advancement might well determine whether the institution will continue to be viewed as a revolving door with little concern for students or as an institution with a strong positive image, people-oriented support services, and a nominal attrition rate. Under such scrutiny decisions can be based on some empirical evidence rather than on tradition or personal penchants that can unwittingly perpetuate impediments to education. A school can have a reputation for its impediments as well as for its football team or strong academic offerings. Knowledge of each of these reputations, these images, will help school administrators better serve learners.

Many institutional barriers are the vestiges of a planning system devised for the traditional full-time student. Dr. Patricia Cross (Lifelong Learning, 1979) synthesized major surveys of adult needs and characteristics and grouped the barriers into five categories.

These include: (1) scheduling problems; (2) problems with location or transportation; (3) lack of courses that are interesting, practical, or relevant; (4) procedural problems related to attendance, red tape, time requirements; and (5) lack of information about procedures and programs (p. 111). The list suggests a need for understanding how marketing impacts all phases of institutional operations. It also spotlights the need to address the needs of a customer who is more discriminating and unwilling, or unable, to waste time.

Traditionally the potential and current student has been reached through the admission recruiters or counselors at the high school. The adult learner, however, is not so static or predictable a population. Even the adults already enrolled in college courses usually attend at night or at off-campus locations. They are out of touch with traditional 8-to-5 school operations. Delivery systems for basic information and services then may necessarily parallel the growth of alternative delivery systems for instruction. Learning centers and business areas may serve as class areas and information bases. An automated information data base that can be accessed by video terminals or telephones in each home might be the next step in creative delivery of the institutional message--whether it be course schedules, catalogs, program material, or counseling. Interactive video display units can be located throughout the service area of the school. Analysis of student populations by descriptors will distinguish those areas where greater marketing is necessary. This same technique used in analysis of alumni has already shown to be useful in distinguishing

donors from non-donors (Krachenberg, 1972).

What faces educational administrators is the fact that the non-traditional student, by any definition, has arrived on the higher education scene with an impact and celerity quite in advance of any organized research or projections. It is these current students and their needs that will help educators shape responses to a future where the consumer will dictate. Marketing can be one means whereby the college or university coalesces as a system to meet a turbulent educational period.

The disjointed marketing done today at the post-secondary level can only serve to exacerbate feelings of separation, of disunity, of impersonality--among faculty, students, and staff. A directed and unified marketing stance can serve not only as a touchstone for the image of the school but as an ameliorating force for the institution and its broadening constituencies. These are constituencies it hopes to serve, must serve, to remain vigorous. The educational present, in terms of marketing and planning, has already foundered. To serve the needs of post-secondary institutions, marketing proponents must aim for the challenges of the educational future. With the marketplace as judge, education will find no harsher critic.

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